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Wright Scholar program anticipates workforce shortages

by Sarah Hubbard, Propulsion Directorate

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, Ohio --- As the summer comes to an end, so does the third year of the Wright Scholar Research Assistant program. Over the past three years, 65 students have been selected for employment under the 10-12 week paid internship program in which stellar high school students undertake research projects under mentor supervision.

The students also participated in a three-day aerodynamics course at the Air Force Institute of Technology, bi-weekly trips to the University of Dayton, a weekly lecture series, and base tours. The students are employed in various Air Force Research Laboratory directorates, AFIT, and the Aeronautical Systems Center.

Steadily increasing in participation and range, the program is working toward its goal of drawing bright, young individuals toward engineering careers in the Air Force to fill expected scientist and engineer shortages.

"This is now more than a pilot program," said John Horner, Wright Scholar program manager. "We have proven that it works over the past three years. We are seeing graduate Wright Scholars seeking continued employment within AFRL and the Air Force as co-ops and college interns. They will be the next generation of scientists and engineers to draw from to fill critical vacancies within AFRL and the Air Force over the next decade."

Thirteen students already have gone on to pursue employment opportunities while enrolled in college under the Student Temporary Employment Program and one has become a co-op (a student involved in a cooperative education work-study partnership).

The Wright Scholar students that could potentially fill the job vacancies have been in the top 5 percent of their high school class with an average GPA of 3.99. After high school graduation, Wright Scholar students are attending some of the most prestigious universities in the nation, such as Carnegie Mellon, Purdue, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Case Western Reserve University, the University of Michigan, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and Columbia.

"These schools are typically hard to recruit from," said Mr. Horner. "But having participated in the Wright Scholar program, these outstanding students know what the Air Force has to



Wright Scholar Daphene Baines microscopically examines the surface of a test specimen after a bearing rig test.

offer in terms of career employment, research opportunities, and excellent training. We asked the students at the end of the summer if they are now interested in an Air Force career based on their Wright Scholar experience. At least two-thirds raised their hands enthusiastically."

Michael Ooten, Wright Scholar program graduate and now a freshman at The Ohio State University who will be coming back next summer under the STEP program said, "Prior to these past two summers, I didn't even consider working for the government. After this experience, however, this is where I not only want to co-op, but work full time after college."

Applications for the Wright Scholar class of 2005 will be available this fall on the AFRL Propulsion Directorate website, www.pr.afrl.af.mil, through the "PR Employment Opportunities" link. All applicants must be a high school junior or senior at the time of application and must be at least 16 years old. Applications must be submitted no later than January 14. Questions may be addressed to Ms. Shelley Rich, shelley.rich@wpafb.af.mil, or phone 937-255-1870. @